



## Editorial

## Open Access publishing



In this issue Dr Alfonso J. Rodríguez-Morales and colleagues express concern that the *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* (IJID) has changed to an Open Access publishing model, and raise the question of whether this is to the benefit of the authors. It is our firm belief that the Open Access model does benefit authors, and I will try to argue why.

Traditionally, scientific journals have been printed on paper and distributed to subscribers. Subscribers have constituted a mix of institutional libraries and individuals. Print journals could be borrowed from a colleague, read at the library, or, if a copy of an article was required, it could be ordered from the institutional library; for those not employed at an institution, a copy of the article could be purchased for a modest fee, often a few dollars, but this would be followed by a wait of a few weeks for the copy to arrive.

With the rise of the Internet and soaring fees for the distribution of printed copies, on-line availability of papers has become the standard, providing instant access to all papers in that journal for subscribers. Non-subscribers are usually requested to pay a fee to obtain access to an article, often between 30 and 40 US dollars per paper. If this is not an option, the authors of the paper can be mailed directly and asked for a copy, with the hope that they will reply within a reasonable time. IJID moved from print to online for members in 2007 and has been totally online for all subscribers since January 2010.

Open access means that your paper is available to everyone globally the minute it is published, without any charge or other restrictions. We think this is a huge benefit to people who are interested in you and your work.

Open Access journals no longer have subscriptions and thus have no income from subscribers. However, the costs of publishing must be covered by some kind of income. These costs include language revision, editing the manuscript into journal format, checking for plagiarism, managing, maintaining and developing the electronic submission platform, and marketing, for instance presence at scientific meetings. Discontinuing the hard copy format and distributing entirely electronically has reduced costs, but the costs mentioned above must still be covered.

Costs can of course be reduced further. Have you ever come across books and certain journals from the 1970s and 1980s in which all papers were typewritten manuscripts published without any editing? I personally find these difficult to read,

with typing and spelling errors, not to mention poor language, and I am sure that readers prefer a paper presented in a familiar format.

In the present Open Access model, authors have to pay a fee, which for IJID is not invoiced before the paper is accepted. Thus submission and review is free of any charge.

In industrialized countries, publication costs are covered by grants from all major public funding agencies. However, many studies are performed by individual scientists without funding, and we sometimes receive letters requesting waivers in this situation. Here the Open Access model would prevent publication of an accepted manuscript. If the Open Access publication fee is prohibitive, there are still many subscription-based journals in which papers are published without any charge, and there are also subscription journals that may accept Open Access papers for a fee, the so-called 'hybrid model'.

IJID grants waivers for manuscripts originating in countries listed by the Research4Life program as low-income. The Research4Life program includes the HINARI program, and has been developed to promote science in low-income countries; this is endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO; <http://www.research4life.org/>). Authors from countries not listed here are expected to pay the Open Access fee.

When we receive requests to waive the publication fee from authors in countries not listed by the Research4Life program, we advise them to consult their institution for help. Academic institutions and hospitals get credit for published, scientific work and thus in our opinion have an obligation to support their scientists by covering the Open Access fee. Some countries outside the industrialized countries already do this.

There has been a concern that the Open Access model will lead to the acceptance of manuscripts with poor reviews simply to improve the cash flow of the journal.<sup>1,2</sup> This is a highly relevant concern. A rapid proliferation of new journals from publishing houses has been seen in recent years, and these publishing houses may have several hundred new Open Access journals in their portfolios. The fees here are lower than those of established journals, and it is also tempting to submit papers to these new journals that have been rejected elsewhere. The review process is an internal matter for each journal and thus the quality of the review process for a particular journal is only reflected in the quality of the accepted papers, which again is reflected in the impact factor of the journal.

The impact factor is the average number of times a paper in a journal is cited by other papers, and is based on the assumption that high quality papers are cited more often. Thus should an Open

Access journal be tempted to accept papers simply to improve cash flow, the impact factor would be expected to decline. Another way to ensure that poor science is not published is to raise the demand for new journals to be accepted in PubMed. PubMed is the key search engine we use to find studies within our field of interest; if journals are not indexed in PubMed, papers published in these journals will be invisible to the scientific community.

In conclusion, I do not share the concerns of Rodríguez-Morales et al. over the Open Access model. The advantage to authors is huge and the advantage of instant free access to the user of the scientific literature is even greater. There are challenges, such as covering the cost in middle-income countries where institutions are not used to covering publication costs, and this is a discussion that must be had in these countries. There are concerns about too many

papers being accepted, however this can be monitored by looking at the number of downloads, citations, and impact factor.

## References

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- [2] Academic publishing. Peer to peer: Portable reviews look set to speed up the publication of papers. Economist. June 8, 2013. Available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/science-and-technology/21578987-portable-reviews-look-set-speed-up-publication-papers-peer-peer/print> (accessed June 2014).

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